



# THE FIRST PALESTINIAN INTIFADA REVISITED

ANDREW RIGBY

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Over recent years there have been a number of books on the significance of unarmed civilian-based resistance in the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. However, there has been a noticeable lack of studies of unarmed resistance against military-backed occupation. In this book, fully revised and updated since its first publication in 1991, Andrew Rigby addresses this gap through a detailed study of the dynamics of the first Palestinian intifada. The focus throughout is upon how Palestinians experienced the years of active resistance, both in relation to protest on the streets and in seeking to create alternative institutions and practices intended to under- mine the foundations of the Israeli occupation. The hopes that drove the intifada were ultimately frustrated – not least because in the final analysis the Israeli occupation did not depend on the cooperation of the Palesti- nians in order to persist. In such circumstances, which have not changed fundamentally over the years, the key leverage over the occupiers continues to lie with those states and agencies upon whose support Israel depends as it continues to deny basic human rights to millions of Palestinians living under occupation.

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In this second revised edition of the work I think it is important to record once again the debt I owed to so many people, without whose friendship and cooperation the work could not have been completed. So, once again I would like to thank in particular the following people: Kainat, Shareen and Sumer Abdul Hadi, Nayef and Naheel Abu-Khalaf, Abu Nadir, Dr Mamdouh al-Aker, Fayez Abu Rahmeh, Khalid Al-Qidreh, Sahar Al Malki, Nafez Assaily, Mubarak Awad, Dr Hisham Awartani and his family, Nadia Bilbassy, Antonia Caccia, Howard Clark, Margaret Dalgety, Dr Uri Davis, Dr Saeb Erekat, Khamis Afiz Eltwok, Dr Gordon Feldman, Amos Gvirtz, Dr Manual Hassassian, Hani Husseini, Joost Hiltermann, John Horton, Deena Hurvitz, Dr Jad Isaac, Mahmoud Hamdi El Jammali, Ali Jiddah, Dr Edy Kaufman, Adam Keller, Khalil Mahshi, Dr Ruchama Marton, Chris McConville and the staff at the British Council in East Jerusalem, Tikva Pamas, Alex Pollock, Roland Rance, Michael Randle, Charles Richards, Mohammed Salahat, Mayson Samor, Ibrahim Shaban, Alya Shawa, Randa Siniora-Atallah, and - of course -

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## PREFACE

Twenty five years ago, in January 1990, a series of events were held in Jerusalem under the title of '1990 – Time for Peace' Below is the fragment of the bib I wore at one of the main events – the circling of the Old City walls of Jerusalem by Palestinian, Israeli and international peace activists. Looking at the photos now brings back the memories of what was then a time of hope as we looked forward to '1990 – Time for Peace'.



Unfortunately, in the months that followed the vitality of the Intifada started to fade, and by the end of the year the unarmed popular uprising was effectively over. By then I had completed my analysis of the Uprising as viewed through the lens of civilian-based resistance. It was published in 1991 under the title *Living the Intifada*.

Over the intervening years I have maintained my engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and nonviolent initiatives for some kind of peace and an end to the occupation. I wish I could claim that the research and study I have done around this conflict since that time has been a source of hope and optimism for peace in the Middle East – but I cannot. It has been a time of false hopes and disappointment. One of my dear friends, a Palestinian who I have known since the 1980s, used to amaze me with his optimism. I remember one evening during the Intifada we sat around discussing whether or not there would be prisons in the new Palestinian state that we both anticipated seeing come into existence. How naïve we were in those days of hope. Over 20 years later I was in conversation with a Palestinian coordinator of a network of non-governmental organisations and talk turned to my old friend. ‘He used to be the most optimistic of people, but now he can only display his optimism out of a sense of political duty and obligation’, I was told. Like others the sense of anticipation for a brighter future was no longer there, but as a public figure he had to work to produce a semblance of such positive emotion.



So, twenty five years on it seems an appropriate time to revisit the first Intifada, to remind ourselves of just how significant the Uprising was during those heady days of 1988-89 when there seemed to be genuine grounds for anticipating a break-through in the struggle to end the occupation and achieve freedom for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and help the Israelis liberate themselves from their role as occupiers and oppressors of another people.

I decided to leave the case study pretty much as it was. I have sub-edited the whole text and added a new chapter on the history of Palestinian unarmed resistance against occupation prior to the Intifada. In addition I have added a new postscript that explores the Palestinian narrative as it unfolded after the first Intifada, concluding with an analysis of the re-emergence of popular unarmed resistance which was occasioned by the construction of the Separation Wall which commenced in 2002.

*Andrew Rigby*

*February 2015*

# 1

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The outbreak of the Intifada took everyone by surprise. Yet it did not just happen. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see the Uprising as a stage in the evolution and development of the Palestinian nationalist movement, one which can be understood as emerging out of the frustrations of the population in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The frustration and resentment that became the motor force behind the revolt were not just with the occupation itself, but also with the PLO and with the outside Arab world. In this regard there was a certain continuity between the factors that brought the Uprising about, and also contributed to its weaknesses, and earlier phases of resistance that characterised the history of the Palestinian national struggle during the decades prior to the outbreak of the Intifada. The aim of this chapter is to present a brief overview of this history – a history of a subject people whose attempts to achieve the full rights of citizenship were repeatedly thwarted by occupying powers and by their own internal conflicts, divisions and weaknesses.

### **Resistance to early waves of Zionist immigration**

In the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zionist migration to Palestine began. The purchase of land from Arab landowners caused resentment amongst Palestinian peasants whose livelihood was threatened by the land acquisitions. So, by the end of the century a pattern of resistance had emerged of peasants clashing with the newcomers, whilst the Palestinian elite submit-

ted petitions to the Ottoman authorities calling for action against the influx. In 1910 there was the first call for an Arab boycott of Jewish produce and businesses. The Palestinian historian A. S. Kayyali described the situation just prior to the collapse of Ottoman rule in 1917 and the establishment of British military control over the territory of Palestine in 1917.

... within the ranks of the nationalist movement in Palestine, the notables performed the role of the diplomats; the educated middle classes that of the articulators of public opinion; and the peasants that of the actual fighters in the battle against the Zionist presence.<sup>1</sup>

## **Resistance during the 1920s**

When news of the Balfour Declaration reached the Palestinians it led to a new awareness of the need to organise. A Muslim-Christian Association (MCA) was established as a counter to Jewish organisations, with branches around the country alongside new youth clubs and other organisations. A day of protest was organised to mark the first anniversary of the Declaration, but in February 1920 the British committed to implementing the Balfour Declaration. This provoked a wave of protest demonstrations, with businesses closing down and protest petitions handed in to the authorities by representatives of the various MCAs.<sup>2</sup> Porath noted,

The organisation of these demonstrations revealed the degree to which the nationalist associations in Palestine had advanced. For the first time they showed an ability to organise a coordinated action on a nation-wide scale in which all the associations took part. The almost identical language of the protest notes strengthens this impression.<sup>3</sup>

A few weeks later the protests erupted again, and this time spilled over into violence, with attacks on Jewish passers-by and stores, and open threats to use force as a means of preventing the realisation of the Zionist project.<sup>4</sup> The clashes reached their height early April 1920 – after four days of disturbances the toll was four Arabs and five Jews dead, 22 seriously wounded (including 18 Jewish victims) and 193 Jews slightly wounded.<sup>5</sup>

It was during this period that the weak and divided nature of the Palestinian political leadership became increasingly apparent. A younger and more dynamic strata of leadership was beginning to emerge, mainly middle-class professionals from the ranks of the Palestinian notable families. But their effectiveness was undermined by the rivalry that characterised the relationships between two of the Palestinian notable families, the Husseinis and the Nashashibis – a conflict that was to mark Palestinian politics throughout the British Mandate period.<sup>6</sup> The division permeated its way through the Palestinian social structure, insofar as each of the families could lay claim to the loyalty and the fealty of families and clans in the rural hinterland, on behalf of whom they had acted as patrons in representing their interests to the Ottoman authorities.

Examining the resistance during the first decade of British civilian rule in Palestine a number of features become apparent.

*1. Frequent clashes between peasantry and Jewish settlers*

For the peasantry who experienced eviction through Jewish land purchases, the immediate response was anger and resentment that could lead to clashes with those directly responsible for their dispossession. But these were localised for, as Rosemary Sayigh has explained, 'From time immemorial Palestinian peasants had found solutions to their problems in village-based collective action.'<sup>7</sup>

2. *Lack of national leadership*

The particularistic and localised world-view of the peasantry was one reason a national movement of resistance did not develop, but another cause was the dominant social and political elite within Palestinian society had no experience of leading large-scale political movements. In the words of Sayigh, 'Not only did the indigenous ruling class have no experience of mass leadership, but the individual notable would never attempt such a course since it would only jeopardise his access to government, and it was on this access that his influence and status depended.'<sup>8</sup>

3. *Elite's commitment to negotiation*

Throughout the Mandate period the main impulse of the Palestinian political elite was to continue their traditional role as interlocutors - representing their clients who owed them allegiance to the authorities. They were most at home as members of delegations to the British or the League of Nations, demanding the revocation of the Balfour Declaration and an end to Jewish migration and the establishment of representative self-government in Palestine.

4. *Symbolic and polemical resistance*

Regular items in the press urged people to oppose the Zionist project. Imams spread the message at Friday prayers in the mosques. Strike days were observed to mark the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and commemorate other days of national historical significance.

5. *From offensive resistance to violence*

From time to time the political leadership would try to mobilise people for protest marches and demonstrations, usually as part of an effort to strengthen their hand in an upcoming round of negotiations with the British. However, large scale demonstra-

tions would often spill over into violence, as happened in May 1921 when clashes that began in Jaffa spread to other parts of the country. After several days order was restored, leaving 48 Arabs and 47 Jews dead, and over 200 from both communities wounded.

6. *Accommodation to occupation*

There were no significant outbreaks of violence between 1922 and 1928. One reason for this relative calm was the decline in Jewish migration during this period. The second reason, according to Kayyali, was ‘the over-riding predominance of factionalism, the ascendancy of personal rivalries and self-interest among the Palestinian political nobility’ as the Husseinis and the Nashashibis fought for control of the SMC.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as Porath noted:

When at the end of 1923 it became clear to everyone that the political effort to effect a change in the pro-Zionist policy of the British government had failed, the reaction of many Palestinians was one of disappointment, despair, and sometimes a search for ways to get some good out of the situation by a policy of cooperation with the authorities. ... In this fashion Zionism gained seven years of undisturbed activity in Palestine, in the course of which it succeeded in nearly doubling the size of the Jewish *yishuv* and in enlarging the area of its map of settlement.<sup>10</sup>

7. *Religion as a driver of resistance*

The calm of those years was superficial, nothing had changed in terms of the basic dynamics and it did not take much to spark off another round of violence. Through 1928 religious tensions had been rising as the Jews sought to extend their rights to worship at the Western Wall, just adjacent to the *al-Haram ash-Sharif*. The perceived threat to one of their most sacred spaces enabled the Palestinian leadership to cast the struggle in a religious light,

and thereby mobilise those who had remained untouched by secular appeals to nationalism, the right of self-determination and other phrases which meant very little to the mass of Palestinians who had virtually no exposure to such ideals nor any experience of self-determination in their own lives. In August 1929 violent clashes broke out in Jerusalem and spread quickly. Within 24 hours 67 Jews had been slaughtered in Hebron and a few days later 45 Jews were killed in Safed. The final death toll was 133 Jews and 116 Arabs, with over 500 wounded.<sup>11</sup> Most of the Jewish casualties were at the hands of Arabs, but the bulk of the Arab deaths and injuries were caused by the British as they sought to protect the Jews and restore order. The violence of 1929 marked a turning point. According to Kayyali,

For the villagers and the masses of Palestinians two important facts were made clearer and sharper by the events of 1929. The first was that Zionism and the Jewish National Home depended, ultimately and inevitably, on British bayonets, and it was therefore necessary to fight Britain if the struggle against Zionism was to achieve its goals. The second concerned the cowardice of the Palestinian notables and their inadequacy to lead the Arabs in the struggle against Zionism and British policy in Palestine.<sup>12</sup>

## **Resistance in the 1930s – the Palestinian Revolt, 1936-39**

The harsh measures meted out by the British who imposed collective punishments on whole villages and neighbourhoods caused added bitterness, strengthening the hand of those calling for violence. The tension continued to rise through the 1930s. It was a period when the economic situation deteriorated, and the suffering of the Palestinians was exacerbated by the rising tide of Jewish immigration, new land purchases and the Jewish boycott of Arab labour, all of which contributed to increased unem-

ployment and indebtedness amongst the Palestinian people. The response was a rapid heightening of the tempo of events and developments running way beyond the control capacity of the established political leadership, whose influence consequently declined. Moreover, a new element had entered the mix with the activities of a para-military group called the Black Hand made up of recruits from the working-class neighbourhoods of Haifa and led by Izzadin al Qassem. During the early 1930s they started attacking Jewish targets and sabotaging government property, but in November 1935 Qassem was killed by the British military near Jenin. His funeral attracted thousands who saw him as a powerful symbol of self-sacrifice and as someone who pointed the way forward in the struggle.

In April 1936 two Palestinians were killed and Palestinian property destroyed in revenge attacks after the murder of two Jewish travellers. In response the Palestinians called for a general strike on April 20<sup>th</sup>. A few days later the Arab Higher Committee was established with Haj Amin Hussein at its head –it became the central political organ of the Palestinians over the next few years. The strike was almost completely solid. Merchants shut up shop and transport came to a virtual halt. Efforts were also made to enforce a total boycott of Jewish products, but Hussein shied away from extending the strike call to Palestinian officials within the British administration, a failure that contributed to a weakening of the overall impact of the strike action. It was also weakened by the fact that the Jewish sector of the economy kept on functioning, providing goods and services, with Jewish workers replacing the striking Arab workforce in Jewish-owned enterprises. Moreover, the strike caused considerable suffering amongst the families of those on strike and who relied on their wage-packets for survival. The suffering was intensified by the draconian response of the British to the protests, with mass arrests, house demolitions, collective punishment and deportations. Such measures served to intensify the incendiary mood, with the result that after the first few weeks the Palestinian re-

sistance took on an armed and violent dimension. Indeed, by the early summer of 1936 a British official was reporting,

Armed bands which a fortnight previously consisted of 15-20 men were now encountered in large parties of 50-70. The bands were not out for loot. They were fighting what they believed to be a patriotic war in defence of their country against injustice and the threat of Jewish domination.<sup>13</sup>

The revolt spread over the succeeding months and by the summer of 1938 it was reported that,

... the rebels were in control of most of the mountainous parts of the country. They were walking fully armed in the streets of Nablus without any hindrance ... By September 1938, the situation was such that civil administration and control of the country was, to all practical purposes, non-existent.<sup>14</sup>

It was during this period that Palestinians developed their own embryonic state structure, in the form of a country-wide network of 'committees'. Nourishment and Supply Committees had been formed in the early months of the strike as a way of meeting the basic needs of those who could not survive without such assistance. Women's Committees organised house to house collections of money and jewellery to provide funds for the movement, whilst a Central Relief Committee distributed funds received from overseas. National Guard Units were formed to enforce the strike and the associated boycott of Jewish products. Special 'Courts of Revolt' were also established to mete out rough justice to those accused of treachery.

The direction of the armed struggle was nominally in the hands of a Central Committee but in fact there was a chronic lack of coordination, with each regional commander jealous to maintain control over the armed bands within his domain against the

intrusions of rival commanders. There were cases of commanders refusing to obey instructions from above because they considered their nominal superior to be socially inferior. Instances of extortion, corruption, intimidation, and betrayal for private ends became so common that some villages organised their own armed militia to defend themselves against the rebels. Underpinning the divisions that emerged lay the bitter rivalry between the faction around the Mufti al-Husseini and the supporters of the Nashashibi family. According to a British teacher in the village of Bir Zeit, by the winter of 1939,

More and more the rebellion was tending to degenerate from a national movement into squabbles between rival rebel bands. Bir Zayt, like many other villages, was no little better than a hornets nest of long standing family feuds, stirred up afresh in the hope of getting some advantage through the help of this or that party of rebels.<sup>15</sup>

Such divisions in the rebel ranks made the task of the British in subjugating the revolt, assisted by the Jewish Haganah, somewhat easier than it might have been. As Porath commented:

The British authorities used various means to weaken the revolt, including sowing dissension among the bands by disseminating rumours about information supplied by rebels of certain bands or areas or by sending extortionists who pretended to be true rebels. The authorities did not have to work too hard in this held in order to be successful. From the outset, but mainly since Autumn 1937, the rebel bands were torn by political, family and regional dissensions, personal jealousies and criminal abuse. The government's activity only marginally contributed to this state of affairs.<sup>16</sup>

By the spring of 1939 the revolt had virtually died out. It had failed as a nationalist struggle against the British and the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, and it had failed as a social revolution, which at one stage it had threatened to become. A key factor was that Palestinians remained more divided by regional, village, clan, and family loyalties than they were united by the appeals of nationalism or class solidarity.

## **The failure of the revolt**

The failure of the Palestinians to achieve their aims during the 1936-39 revolt can be attributed to a number of factors.

1. Theories of nonviolent resistance advise us that all oppressive regimes rely on different sources of support, and the challenge for nonviolent resisters is to erode those pillars upon which the regime relies. One key means by which this can be achieved is by getting key workers and personnel to withdraw their cooperation and deprive the regime of their essential services. But, as we have seen, the economic impact of the general strike was limited in part because there was a whole sector of society (the Jewish sector) that continued to work and provide for the basic needs of their population. In the Palestinian case, the real suffering was borne by the strikers themselves.
2. The British Mandate was dependent on its many Arab administrative officers and officials, from the level of the local municipality up to the office of the High Commissioner himself. If these officers had withdrawn their labour and cooperation the impact on the capacity of the British administration to function would have been significant. But the political leadership of the Palestinians refused to order the officials to withhold their services. In hindsight it would seem to have been a monumental error of judgement.
3. The main reason the strike call was not issued to the officials would seem to be that the Palestinian notables were too reluctant to risk their vested interests (property, wealth,

status and influence) which, to a significant degree, depended on maintaining good relations with the British administration. In effect they prioritised their personal and family interests above that of the nation and the common good.

4. The leadership refused to relinquish their reliance on diplomacy and negotiation as the means to achieving their ends. They failed to grasp the absolute commitment of the British to the Zionist project of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine.<sup>17</sup>
5. The Palestinians suffered from a severe imbalance of power which they were unable to rectify. Their appeals to the Arab and Muslim worlds failed to produce significant interventions, in part because the targets of such appeals were themselves under foreign domination and had their own interests. An obvious example of this was Abdullah of Transjordan who had aspirations to absorb Palestine into his own kingdom.
6. The Palestinian leadership was weak and divided, reflecting in some way the fissured social structure from which they had emerged. They faced a Zionist society that was highly organised, well-financed, with a determined leadership and significant networks of support amongst the Jewish diaspora throughout the world.

## **Partition, the *Nakba* and establishment of state of Israel**

Britain emerged from the Second World War exhausted and in February 1947 announced it was handing over responsibility for Palestine to the United Nations (UN). In August the UN announced its proposal for partition which was duly approved by the General Assembly on November 2 1947. On the ground violent clashes erupted almost immediately and by the end of the year a virtual civil war was underway, accompanied by large-scale ethnic cleansing. The aim of the Zionists was to cleanse the territory allotted to them by the UN and gain control of

other areas where there was a significant Jewish population. In such a situation of escalating violence there was little space for nonviolent initiatives.<sup>18</sup>

On May 15 1948 the state of Israel was declared into existence, by which date more than a third of the Palestinian population had been driven from their homes.<sup>19</sup> Only at that point did the Arab states intervene militarily – an exercise notable for its lack of coordination and paucity of equipment. The motivation for such half-hearted intervention was suspect from the start, as Pappe has noted,

That the Arab states succeeded in fielding any soldiers at all is remarkable. Only at the end of April 1948 did the politicians in the Arab world prepare a plan to save Palestine, which in practice was a scheme to annex as much of it as possible to the Arab countries participating in the war.<sup>20</sup>

The most significant illustration of this phenomenon concerned the machinations of Abdullah of Jordan who, with the connivance of the British, had reached an understanding with the Zionists to divide Palestine between them, with the territory apportioned to the Palestinians by the UN to come under the control of the Hashemite kingdom. As a consequence of this understanding Abdullah kept his well-trained Arab Legion in check during the war, restricting its advances to the control of the territory it was intended to annex.

By the end of October 1948 what had now become the Israeli army controlled over three quarters of the former Palestinian territory. The defeat for the Palestinians was total. Over 400 villages had been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. Around 75 - 80% of the Palestinian population had been displaced and dispossessed. The Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military rule, whilst Jordan annexed the West Bank. In the new state of Israel all immigration restrictions were lifted for Jews, who flooded in

and took over the abandoned properties of their previous Palestinian owners. Israel celebrated victory in its national liberation struggle, Palestinians mourned the catastrophe (*Nakba*) that had overcome them.

## **Battir – a small victory in the midst of tragedy<sup>21</sup>**

Battir in 1948 was a small village of some 1000 inhabitants just a few miles south-west of Jerusalem abutting the Jerusalem-Jaffa railway line. It had been on the front-line during the fighting but had never been over-run. King Abdullah had come to an understanding with the Jewish Agency that his Arab Legion would not attack Jewish troops once they had reached the anticipated armistice line between the new state of Israel and what would be the Jordanian-controlled territory of the West Bank. The bilateral armistice agreement of March 1949 established the agreed border based largely on the front-line positions held at the time of the UN-sponsored ceasefire of June 1948. Where there was disagreement two boundary lines were drawn on the map, with the land in-between designated ‘no-man’s-land’ (NML) whilst the matter was referred to a special bilateral armistice committee charged with reaching agreement over such disputes. Battir was one of the villages that fell within the strip of NML south of Jerusalem, which meant that the village should have been evacuated. That this did not happen was due largely to a civil resistance campaign orchestrated by one of the village leaders, Hasan Mustafa.

Mustafa had been active organising the defence of the village during the war and was determined that a village that had remained unoccupied during the hostilities should not be lost as a consequence of the peace. To defend the village he followed a two-pronged strategy: 1) Active and persistent lobbying of the members of the armistice committee, arguing that Battir had never been conquered and therefore should not be evacuated; 2) Creating the appearance of a village that was fully inhabited and

ready to defend itself against attack in order to deter the Israelis from making any pre-emptive assault. He was helped in his lobbying by the fact that there were several Jordanian military officers involved in the deliberations who were unhappy with Abdullah's conduct of the war and were sympathetic to Battir's cause. In April 1949 his efforts bore fruit when the committee routed the armistice line such that the bulk of the village remained under Jordanian control, whilst allowing Israel to take control of the railway line running alongside the village. The decision was to come into force on May 1 1949. To deter any unilateral action by the Israelis to create more facts on the ground Mustafa organised young men to go and light lamps in the village houses at night, make as much noise as possible, and generally do all that they could to give the impression that the village was fully inhabited, when in fact most of the villagers spent their nights in a neighbouring village out of fear of an Israeli assault.

On the day the agreement was due to come into effect Mustafa went to meet the Israeli officer (Moshe Dayan) and it was agreed that the villagers would be allowed to cultivate their lands on the other side of the railway line, so long as they only used the access routes under the railway bridges and did not cross over the railway track itself. Once this agreement was reached Mustafa sent vehicles to collect those villagers who had been staying outside the village so they could get back to their homes as quickly as possible. In order to ensure that the villagers took advantage of the agreement he then accompanied them in accessing their land across the railway track. In this way the villagers of Battir succeeded in holding on to their land – one of the few 'Palestinian success stories' within the broader context of the overwhelming catastrophe experienced by the bulk of Palestinians during the partition period. As such various lessons can be drawn.

### *1. The importance of strong leadership*

The resistance would not have taken place without the leadership of Hasan Mustafa. The fact that he was not only a 'son of

the village' but also the son of the headman gave him the status and authority to influence and mobilise people. He also had the courage to lead by example, accompanying the villagers as they risked their lives in accessing their fields across the 'green line'. He also had the self-confidence and the status to negotiate with Moshe Dayan, the officer in charge of the Israeli troops facing the village on the day the new border was to come into force, asserting the villagers' right of access to their farm-land.

*2. Social solidarity and shared commitment to the cause*

Nothing is likely to mobilise people more than a perceivable and immediate threat to their homes and their means of livelihood, and this is what the villagers of Battir faced. The alternative they faced was dispossession and displacement.

*3. Recognition of the legitimacy of the struggle and good communication with third parties*

Hasan Mustafa was able to convince disgruntled Jordanian officers that the village had never been occupied, and as a consequence they were able to present his case to the Armistice Committee, which agreed on a re-routing of the border that took account of the Israeli interest in gaining control of the rail line whilst also accommodating the village interest in ensuring its own future existence.

## **The lost years of the 1950s**

Between the disaster of 1947-48 and the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964 there was virtually no significant collective manifestation of Palestinian nationalism of any sort. The reasons for this are not hard to find.

*1. Dispersal, dispossession and division*

Palestinian society had been devastated. Over half the population had been dispersed to refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Less than 200,000 remained in the territory that had become Israel. Not only were they divided

geographically, they also confronted different host regimes. In the Jordanian-annexed West Bank they received Jordanian nationality. The Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military administration, whilst the Palestinians left in Israel received Israeli citizenship but lived under military rule until 1966. Conditions for the refugees in Lebanon and Syria varied over time and according to the political climate.

## *2. The trauma of loss*

Scattered and separated from each other, Palestinians were also disempowered by the deep trauma and shock suffered by those with a deep attachment to place who found themselves uprooted, no longer a majority in their own homeland but relegated to minority and subordinate status in states that were not their own.

## *3. Faith in pan-Arabism*

The quiescence of the Palestinians during the 1950s was also due in part to the popularity of the pan-Arab ideal as embodied above all in Nasser's rise to power in Egypt in 1952. As a dispossessed people the Palestinians could regain their strength and their agency through the resurgent power of the Arab nation, a single people sharing language, history and culture who had been divided by the machinations of imperialist powers. Palestine would be 'liberated' in the context of the renewal of the Arab nation and associated political unification

## *4. The priority of economic survival*

For most Palestinians reduced to poverty and subordinate status in their new anomic conditions, the priority was survival – particularly economic survival. This was particularly challenging in the face of discriminatory regulations and practices that limited employment opportunities in Jordan, Lebanon and Israel.

## **1960s – The emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation**

In 1950 a young engineering student at Cairo University who was later to be known as Yasser Arafat set up a 'Union of Palestinian Students' with some friends. A short while later in Beirut, George Habash, a medical student at the American University, set up another student group. Grassroots organisations were also being established in the Gaza Strip, and by the mid-1950s there was an embryonic network of nationalist organisations, all of them very small and very weak. Incursions into Israel from Gaza and the West Bank started in an ad hoc fashion, monitored closely by the Egyptian and Jordanian authorities who had no desire to provoke Israel. It was out of this network that the main resistance organisation, Fatah, emerged and in 1964 the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was formed. The 1967 'June War' between Israel and her Arab neighbours ended with Israel capturing the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. This outcome rang the death-knell of popular faith in pan-Arabism and boosted the fortunes of Fatah which became the prime agency of the Palestinian national movement.

Looking back on this period prior to the first intifada through the lens of nonviolent or unarmed resistance, a number of observations come to mind.

### *1. The glorification of armed struggle*

It was with the rise of Fatah and the PLO that the iconic figure of the Palestinian fighter with his Kalashnikov emerged and which was to become the symbol of Palestinian resistance in subsequent decades. Palestine was to be 'liberated' – i.e. a Palestinian state established - through 'armed struggle'. Indeed, resistance was synonymous with armed struggle - a belief that the PLO shared with other contemporary liberation movements who all adopted the rhetoric of third world nationalism and anti-imperialist struggle. Following the 1967 war the initial strategy of

the PLO was the fanciful one of using the occupied territories as a base for a popular guerrilla struggle. After a few months this was abandoned and Jordan was identified as the most appropriate launch pad for guerrilla raids. This was complemented by a terrorist campaign characterised by plane hijackings intended to force a change in western policies towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

## *2. Palestinians as victims*

Rashid Khalidi has pointed to the fact that according to Palestinian perceptions they have experienced a series of crushing defeats throughout their recent history at the hands of an array of enemies so powerful as to have been virtually unassailable. Again and again Palestinian history is presented as one of heroic struggle against impossible odds betrayed by traditional leaders and perfidious Arab states.<sup>22</sup> One consequence of this world-view is that the Palestinians can be absolved from responsibility for their failures. As Khalidi remarked, 'From this perspective, if their enemies were so numerous and powerful, it is hardly surprising that they were defeated.'<sup>23</sup>

## *3. The portrayal of defeat as triumph*

Khalidi has pointed to a related peculiarity of the Palestinian world-view - the way in which failures have been portrayed as victories, or at least as heroic perseverance against impossible odds. According to his analysis,

This narrative of failure as triumph began during the Mandate, but reached its apogee in the years after 1948, when it was picked up and elaborated by the grassroots underground Palestinian nationalist organisations that would emerge and take over the PLO in the mid-1960s.<sup>24</sup>

Amongst the examples he cites is the martyrdom of Izzadin al Qassem, the 1936-39 revolt, the 1947-49 catastrophe, the battle of Karama on March 21 1968, Black September of 1970 when

the PLO were expelled from Jordan by force of arms, and the subsequent expulsion from Beirut in 1982. A few months after the exodus from Lebanon there was a meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC) in Algiers, when attempts were made to present the evacuation as a victory. Khalidi quotes the caustic comment of Issam Sartawi who observed, 'One more "victory" like this one, and we will have the next meeting of the PNC in the Seychelles Islands!'<sup>25</sup>

#### *4. Shifts in the Palestinian political centre of gravity*

As the PLO became the dominant agency within the Palestinian national struggle, the Palestinian political centre of gravity shifted. As the PLO was forced to relocate to Jordan after the 1967 occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank and after the subsequent expulsion from Jordan to Lebanon in 1970 it was the refugees who came to be seen as potential recruits for the armed liberation struggle. Moreover, it was amongst the refugee communities, especially in Lebanon, that the PLO pursued its own form of constructive resistance with the establishment of its own broad welfare infrastructure, which in turn enhanced its standing among the refugees. This focus distanced the PLO from the Palestinians in the occupied territories, a separation heightened by the problems of communication after the 1967 war and the ensuing Israeli occupation.

### **The situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories**

The message for the Palestinians in the occupied territories embodied in all these developments became clear: stay steadfast, make babies, and eventually you will be liberated as a consequence of the pressure generated by the PLO and its allies outside. In essence their allotted role was a passive one. In truth, the space available for organising any form of collective resistance to the occupation was severely circumscribed. Any signs of opposition to the occupation met with severe repression.

This in turn made it difficult for any coherent leadership to emerge within the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT), a process that was also hampered by the suspicions of the the PLO leadership outside regarding potential rivals to its own leadership position. The grouping they were most wary of was the communists who were the most advanced underground political organisation. As early as 1968 the communists had established National Guidance Committees, but in 1973 it was the PLO that was instrumental in establishing the Palestinian National Front (PNF) as an attempt to coordinate nationalist activities in the occupied territories within a PLO framework. The Front was led by an eight member committee representing the communists and various PLO organisations. Although most of its activities were carried out clandestinely, its work was severely curtailed by the Israelis, and it was eventually outlawed in October 1979.

Denied the opportunity to express themselves openly in any overtly political organisation, the young nationalists within the OPT established other vehicles for education and mobilisation. Student and professional associations, trade unions, women's societies, social and cultural associations, and other grassroots organisations became the main agencies for promoting the struggle against the occupation. The activists received encouragement in this constructive resistance work from the outside leadership after the PLO had agreed in 1974 upon an intermediate goal of establishing a 'national authority' on any part of Palestine from which the Israelis might withdraw.

In anticipating the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, the leadership of the PLO was concerned to create the institutional infrastructure for such a state as early as possible. In fact, the grass-roots organisations that were established during the 1970s were seen as having a dual role. On the one hand, they were to serve as agencies for the political organisation and mobilisation of the people, seedbeds of offensive resistance. On the other hand, they also existed as forms of constructive resistance providing basic personal and community services that

were not provided by the Israeli occupiers. Thus, in a somewhat paradoxical manner, the absence of certain state services created the institutional space for the development of alternative, Palestinian 'quasi-state' organisations and agencies. Through the provision of much-needed services and facilities, such grass-roots organisations gained the allegiance of the majority of the Palestinian population, and as such constituted the nucleus of an alternative structure of authority and power to rival that of Israeli military government. Indeed, according to Salim Tamari,

This strategy of informal resistance ... or institutional resistance was actually far more successful than even its own designers envisioned. By the late 1970s, it had established the complete political hegemony of Palestinian nationalism and the PLO as the single articulator of Palestinian aspirations.<sup>26</sup>

This growth in nationalist sentiment and commitment amongst the inhabitants of the OPT was not due solely to the influence of the political activists amongst their number. It also reflected the enhanced prestige of the PLO following the October 1973 War and the 1974 Arab Summit at Rabat. Primarily, however, it was due to the growth in anti-Israeli sentiment aroused by the burgeoning settlements and the harsh treatment of protesters meted out by Israeli troops. The spread of nationalist feeling was illustrated most graphically in the 1976 municipal elections, which the Israelis allowed to be held. Most of the councillors and mayors elected openly identified with the PLO and their election marked the political ascendancy of a newer, more radical political generation.

Following the election of the Likud government in 1977 and the subsequent Camp David Accords, the new mayors were instrumental in establishing the National Guidance Committee in October 1978. Its composition reflected a very wide spectrum of Palestinian nationalist political orientations, including the nationalist mayors and representatives of trade unions, societies

and associations. The aim was to organise and coordinate an open political struggle against the occupation in general and the autonomy proposals of Camp David in particular. However, its non-clandestine form and the fact that many of its members were public figures made the Committee particularly vulnerable to Israeli counter-measures. Its effectiveness was greatly reduced by the imposition of restriction orders, arrests and the deportation of leading figures in the Committee, whilst in June 1980 the mayors of Nablus and Rarnallah were severely maimed by car bombs. In March 1982, the remaining mayors were dismissed and the Committee outlawed by the Israeli Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon.

During the period following the destruction of the PLO's infrastructure in Beirut in 1982, morale within the occupied territories was low. The Arab world was in disarray as a consequence of the Iran-Iraq war, and the inhabitants of the occupied territories were left feeling isolated and alone. According to Sarah Graham-Brown, by 1983 Fatah had become the strongest political current in the OPT, followed by the Communist Party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and lastly the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).<sup>27</sup> Unable to organise openly, these different political factions had used the trade unions, professional associations, student union groups and the different grass-roots organisations as arenas for political competition. Even in the 1970s there had always been considerable rivalry between the different political organisations, with a consequent duplication of service-provision agencies in some areas, each affiliated with a different political faction. In the first half of the 1980s relationships between the different nationalist factions deteriorated, considerably, a process that to some degree reflected the disunity and factional rivalry within the PLO itself during the years after 1982. Arafat's courtship of Jordan's King Hussein and his seeming preparedness to consider some kind of Jordanian-Israeli condominium over the occu-

pied territories, helped to provoke a rebellion from within the ranks of Fatah itself.

However, in February 1986, negotiations between King Hussein and Arafat finally broke down, whilst the pressure for the reunification of the PLO grew as Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were besieged by Syria's clients, the militia forces of Amal. Increasingly urgent demands were also coming from the inhabitants of the occupied territories, who were calling for some political initiative before it was too late and all their land was expropriated for the use of Israeli settlers. The USSR also played a key role as mediator helping to bring about a reconciliation between the different groupings. All this came to fruition at the 18<sup>th</sup> Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting of April 1987 in Algiers. It was at this meeting also that the Palestine Communist Party was welcomed as a full member of the PLO for the first time. This unprecedented display of unity provided a necessary basis for coordination and cooperation between the different nationalist factions within the occupied territories – which in turn was a necessary condition for the outbreak of the Intifada.

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Kayyali, *The Palestinian Arab reactions to Zionism and the British Mandate, 1917-1939*, University of London, doctoral thesis, February 1970, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> According to Porath 1500 demonstrated in Jerusalem, 2000 in Jaffa and 250 in Haifa. Y. Porath, *The Palestinian-Arab national movement, 1918-1929* (vol. 1), London: Frank Cass, 1974, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Porath (1974), p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Porath (1974), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Kayyali, p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> The occasion was the dismissal of Musa al-Husseini as Mayor of Jerusalem because of the role he was deemed to have played

inciting the crowd in the April disturbances, and the appointment of Raghīb al-Nashashibi to replace him on the orders of the British Governor of Jerusalem District.

<sup>7</sup> R. Sayigh, *Palestinians: From peasants to revolutionaries*, London: Zed Books, 1979, pp. 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> Sayigh, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Kayyali, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Porath (1974), p. 135. It is also worth noting that at this stage Haj-Amin Husayni was amongst the most forceful opponents of any suggestion of resorting to violence, as he sought the support of the British in building up his power base within the SMC.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to record that 19 local Arab families in Hebron saved 435 Jews by hiding them in their houses during the pogrom. See <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1106426.html> (accessed April 3, 2015))

<sup>12</sup> Kayyali, p. 217.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Kayyali, p. 292.

<sup>14</sup> Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement 1929-1939; From riots to rebellion*, London: Frank Cass, 1977, p. 236.

<sup>15</sup> H. M. Wilson, quoted in Porath (1977), p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> Porath (1977), p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Whenever it seemed that the Palestinians might gain some concession from the British, the Zionists would arrange counter-lobbies in Jerusalem and London, mobilise constituencies of support in key locations, and get the concession reversed.

<sup>18</sup> Nonviolence proved to be no defence whatsoever against the power of armed might. The villagers of Dir Yassin were raped and slaughtered despite having signed a non-aggression pact with their Jewish neighbours. Further north in the mixed-town of Tiberias the community leaders of both communities had also signed a non-aggression pact in March 1948. The following month the *Hagana* took control of the city and expelled the Arab residents.

<sup>19</sup> I. Pappé, *A history of modern Palestine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Pappé, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> This section is based on the unpublished MA dissertation of Jawad Botmeh, *Civil resistance in Palestine: the village of Battir in 1948*, Coventry University, September 2006. Accessible at <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/peacestudies/a/1136>

<sup>22</sup> R. Khalidi, *Palestinian identity: The construction of modern national consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 196.

<sup>23</sup> Khalidi, p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> Khalidi, p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Khalidi, pp. 198-9. Satarwi was subsequently murdered in Lisbon. In 1983. The assassination was presumed to be the work of the dissident Abu Nidal group.

<sup>26</sup> S. Tamari, 'What the uprising means', *Middle East Report*, May-June 1988, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> S. Graham-Brown, 'Report from the occupied territories', *MERIP Reports*, 115, June 1983, p. 5.